



HYG-5232-09

Tips for New Parents

Having a new baby in the family is one of the most special times in a parent's life. As you look at that little one you think about the miracle of life and how special this little person is to you. Children are a precious resource and parenting a very important role.

In our role as parents, we are the prime educators of our children. It is important to remember that no two children are alike. Each child is a unique individual with strengths and weaknesses. Accept children for what each of them are and love them all unconditionally.

Most parents have no formal training for their parenting roles. Our knowledge comes from watching our own parents or other parents. We learn through experience, education, and observation. There is no one right way to parent. In addition, there are no perfect parents.

Bonding

It is important for new parents to bond with their infants. The first few days are important. Spend time holding, cuddling, and caring for your infant. These seemingly simple tasks help the parent and child become attached. Bonding may not take place in one special moment. It can be a long-term process that takes time and effort.

Normal Growth and Development

A growth and development chart will provide general information about what to expect a child to do at a particular age. The information is meant to be a "yardstick" by which to evaluate a child's progress. Remember, however, no two children grow and develop at the same rate. Don't compare your child's development with another child's. Each child grows and develops at his or her own pace.

If you notice that your child is delayed in a particular area, discuss the delays with your family physician. The physician can evaluate the child and make a determination for why the delay exists.

Crying

Babies vary in how much they cry. Some babies cry a lot and others not very much. A baby communicates his or her wants and needs to you by crying. Your baby may have one cry when he or she is hungry, another cry when he or she needs a diaper changed, and another when he or she is bored.

As a parent, you need to respond to your baby's cries so that the baby will develop a sense of trust and security. There is no need to believe that comforting, playing with, or caring for your baby will spoil him or her.

Shaken Baby Syndrome

Parents must be careful when handling their infant. A baby's neck muscle is weak and the head is large and heavy. As a result, it is very important to support the infant's neck and head. If an infant is shaken violently, shaken baby syndrome can result. The brain moves back and forth in the skull resulting in bruising, swelling, and bleeding. The results of these injuries may lead to permanent, severe brain damage or even death. As a result, it is very important to learn how to care for your infant and learn positive ways to sooth a crying baby.

Feeding Your Baby

It is important for parents to make informed decisions about feeding their babies. Look at the pros and cons of breast feeding versus bottle feeding. Ask lots of questions and make informed decisions regarding

feeding. It is important to remember that feeding recommendations have changed and they may be different today from when your grandmother or mother were feeding their children.

Trust Yourself

Many new parents are nervous when they bring their newborn home from the hospital. Trust in your own abilities to be a good parent.

You will have the most contact with your child and will be aware of changes in behavior and appearance. If you have a question or a concern, don't be afraid to ask about it. If you don't agree with the first answer you receive, ask several others and compare answers. A physician, health professional, and Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educator are good sources of information.

To Work or Not to Work

Whether one or both parents will work will be a personal decision made in consultation with others in the family. Going to work doesn't make you a "bad" parent just as staying home doesn't automatically make you a "good" parent. Whatever decision your family agrees upon will be the right one for you. Try not to feel guilty about the decision you make.

If you do choose to work outside the home, quality child care is important. Quality child care includes three important things:

1. A caregiver who provides your child with care and guidance and who works with you and your family to make sure that your child grows and learns in the best way possible.
2. A setting that keeps the child safe and healthy.
3. Activities that are suited to your child's stage of growth and development and that help your child develop mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally.

Time for You

With all the demands of parenthood, it is easy to put your own needs aside and concentrate exclusively on your new baby. You may be up late, up in the middle of the night, up at the crack of dawn, and up all day long. It doesn't take long to get tired and grouchy.

It is important to take time for yourself. Be sure to take care of your physical health. Mothers need to take the time they need to recover from childbirth. Sleep when the baby is sleeping. Eat nutritious foods so your body can recover from having the baby. Follow your doctor's advice.

It is not uncommon for new mothers to experience a let down after the initial excitement of the baby's birth. Don't be afraid to share your feelings. It helps to put your feelings into words. When you feel bogged down, don't be afraid to ask for help. Your family and friends can be a wonderful support system.

Enjoy Your New Baby

Take the time to enjoy parenthood. Have fun playing with your baby. Hold, rock, and cuddle your baby. Talk to each other. Read stories. Go for walks. Sing. Play gentle games together like peek-a-boo or patty-cake, but only as long as you both enjoy the game.

Don't be afraid to show your love for your child. Remember, it is the small things that count — a smile, a hug, or just being there to listen and respond to needs.

Resources

- Bee, H. (1999). *The growing child: An applied approach*. New York: Longman.
- Berk, L.E. (2008). *Child development*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Braxelton, T.B. (1992). *Touchpoints: Your child's emotional and behavioral development*. Reading, MA: A Merloyd Lawrence Book.

Prepared by Lois Clark, CFCS, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, Auglaize County, Ohio State University Extension

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

Visit Ohio State University Extension's web site "Ohioline" at: <http://ohioline.osu.edu>

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA.

Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension

TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868